

Ellen Green Remembered



Hillsborough Remembers

Norman Cannon
by Priscilla Lakus
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This is an interview with Mr. Norman T. Cannon. Mr. Cannon resides in Port Tampa, city of Tampa, Florida. And Mr. Cannon was involved with many of the events during Mrs. Green's days with the civil rights movement. And he knows of many of her achievements. We are conducting this interview on Wednesday, August the 15th, 2007 at the Port Tampa City Library. The interviewer is Priscilla Lakus, and I am representing the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library system's oral history collection project.

Priscilla Lakus (PL): *And I'd like to say good afternoon to Mr. Cannon, and welcome him to this session. And my first question, Mr. Cannon, is, How did you meet Ms. Ellen Green?*

Norman Cannon (NC): Well, good evening, Ms. (). I remember Ms. Green, as a young man, back in the--, as you said, the '50s, and she was a friend of the family. And she's always been a civic-minded person, as they come down to Port Tampa. And she's always wanted to help out the Port Tampa community and the Port Tampa black community. You know, when the times were--. We were struggling for civil rights. And Ms. Green was always there to try to help out, to try to bring about change. She was that type of a person. She's always had a friendly attitude toward anyone. And she would work with you to try to make things better. That was her attitude.

And as a friend of the family, she also married my uncle, which was Mike Green. And they were married for quite a long time. And I always--. She would always call me for help in the setting up her (), which was at her house. And I'll never forget that. And I would always go there and do that. And we always had a long conversation.

But one of the things that always sticks out in my mind about Ms. Green was the struggle we were having with the Hillsborough County school board, when they wanted to put portables in Port Tampa. And this was back in the early '60s. And her and some of the other people in the Port Tampa area-- my father, Nathaniel

Cannon, Sr. and my mother, () Cannon, and Mrs. Jack--, Mrs. Conyers, and other members of Port Tampa-- decided that we didn't want this. And so they boycotted Hillsborough County school board.

And what happened was that they kept us out of school. Some did go to the portables, but some didn't. We wanted to go back to Blake High School and Middleton High School. And Mrs. Green, like I said--.

And I think our attorney name was--. I'm not sure of his name, but I see--, you can say it, because I may give the wrong name. But anyway, we had an attorney. Ms. Green was one of the ones in the forefront. And we led the--, she led the charge. And we had various meetings with Hillsborough County school board to try to get us back to Blake and Middleton. And they kept us out of school, and they picketed up and down where the portables were, which were between Juanita Street and Sherrill Street. And they--. People would bring food to support us. And we would be right next to Mrs. Gibbs' house.

And Mrs. Green and my father- they had numerous meetings with Hillsborough County administrators on how to resolve this problem. And they would take us, and if we were not in school, we would go to St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church. And they set up schools there for us, just to keep us out of trouble. And they would teach us there.

And they fought on for--. Oh, I'm not sure how many weeks or months this went on. But finally, they came to an agreement that they would allow-- I think it went from the eighth grade on up to the twelfth grade-- to go back to the schools that we had requested, which was Howard W. Blake and Middleton High School. So we got a chance to get this resolved.

But Ms. Green was one of the ones there that was most eloquent in saying to Hillsborough County this is not what we want, and everything, to the school board. So that was one battle that we final--, eventually won. And eventually, they removed all of the portables, and all of the students were able to go back to the schools in which they were previously assigned to, you know. But this is just one of the things I know of her.

PL: ().

NC: And she was also--. As we said, she was the president of the Negro Council of Women in Hillsborough County. And she was also on the mayor's African American Task Force, which was another task force which was set up with different members from all over the city of Tampa. If I'm not mistaken, what was the governor's--? Oh, the governor name that--. Marti--? Was it Martinez? Governor Martinez--

PL: Governor Martinez.

NC: --was the one that set this up at first. And we all would meet, and we would give--. Ms. Green was on this council, along with myself and my father, Nathaniel Cannon, Sr. And we would all sit around and discuss how we could make our communities better- you know, what we needed in our communities. And these things went on even to today with Mayor Pam Iorio, now having this same comm--, membership and everything of various communities and everything. So it's still going on today.

And again, Ms. Green was always the one that was there. When you needed her for anything in the community that she thought that we should be fighting for, she was there to help out, you know, and lead the way. And she would, you know, be most professional about it. We would, you know, address the issues, and she would address the issues and you know, let you know exactly what she thought should be done and everything. And we would all discuss these things and all, and we would come to an agreement that this would be the best way to do this.

But she was always in that leadership role and everything. She would certainly voice her opinion. She was not shy when it come down to, you know, voicing her opinion about something she thought was wrong and everything. And I thought that was one of her better qualities and everything.

And although she was outspoken, she was kind and gentle. And she was just a lady that was a lady, and everything, in the way that she conducted herself. She was a Christian lady and everything. She always had a wonderful smile and a beautiful laugh. And I just can't forget these things, you know, because they are things that you picture in your mind, and they stay there and everything.

And as I said, she was a member of our whole family. And, you know, we all loved her and we will all miss her. And I just, you know, I just see her sometimes when we have problems, and I say to myself, Now, Ms. Green would address this, and everything, and would not let it go. And those--. That's some of the things that I remember about her and everything.

PL: *Well, you've shared some stories with us. Are there any, maybe, personal stories that you can recall, of--, that you want to share with us?*

NC: Hmm, let's see. Personally, knowing her, I worked on her car in--. When there was something that would happen with her car, she would call me.

PL: *[Chuckle]*

NC: And I would go there and repair the car and stuff. And we'd get it back to running and all. And, you know, she would thank me, and we would, you know, go from--. Well, those are the personal things that I knew about her- I mean, just between me and her and everything.

PL: Yeah.

NC: And sometimes we would just sit there and talk about Port Tampa. We'd talk about Tampa. We'd talk about politics, you know, and things in general, you know.

And she always made good sense-- good common sense and everything-- on how this should be handled and what she thought the results would eventually be, you know. So those--. And we just had a personal relationship in that we were very good friends, you know. And if I needed her, she would come.

And she was most active at Mount Zion AME Church, which was her church. And on the fifth Sunday--. I'll never forget- I think it was her and another group that helped to set up the fifth Sundays in each month, which I think about three or--, between three and six, that the two churches would get together, which were Mount Zion AME and St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church. And we would fellowship together. But she was one of the ones that helped to put this together. So those--. That was a good thing. That was a good thing- to bring the two churches together. And so--.

PL: *Someone told me that she was small in stature, but she carried a big stick.*
[Laughter]

NC: She did. Yeah. Mm-hmm. And the way that she spoke and everything, she was most eloquent and got to the point and everything, and brought it out so clearly that you could not misunderstand what she was saying, you know.

And if she was for that thing, I would say she would fight on 'til it came to a conclusion. She would definitely do that, you know. I know that and everything. She would not let go of it- mm-mm. It had to--. You had--. One way or another, you had to say, OK, no, we're not going to do this, or Yes, we are going to do this, and everything. But she did finally--

PL: *No sitting on the fence for her!* [Laughter]

NC: No, no sitting on the fence! [Laughter] No way, you know. But ().

PL: *She sounds like such a wonderful lady.*

NC: She was. And her hospitality- if you came to her house, she was most gracious. I don't care who you were- she was most gracious. () she would offer you something to drink or something to eat, as people did during those days and everything. And that's just the way she was and everything. And she carried that out until the day she died.

I remember the last time I met with her, I--, she said--. You know, we hugged each other, and she said--. I didn't know, because she was in, I think, her early nineties at that time, and she was sort of a little feeble and everything. But she still recognized me, and we talked briefly and everything. And she was concerned about me when I was concerned about her--

PL: [Chuckle]

NC: --and everything, because I had been in a terrible truck accident and everything. But we talked and everything. And you know, she was in her nineties. And she was saying, "I don't know why the Lord is still leaving me here," and everything. But I said, "Well, He still probably has a purpose for you." You know, but--.

She was still--, she was smiling even then and everything, knowing that she was in God's hands. And this is just what I remember of Ms. Green and everything. She was that type of a person.

PL: Seems like her deep faith just carried her through a lot of things.

NC: It sure did. It really, really did. She trusted the Lord with all of her heart, you know. And you could tell, because of her participation in her church and in her community and everything. She believed the word of God- that it was in what it said; and what He said, He meant; and if we followed Him with all of our heart, He would direct and () our steps. And He did for her. He really did- in so many different ways.

PL: Well, you talked to her when you were a younger man. Did she ever talk to you about what things were like when she was young?

NC: Mm! We knew that there were struggles there. We knew that there was segregation. We knew that they had to go through a lot, and she didn't say a whole lot. But she was the person--, like we said, an aggressive person, where she could make change, she would, and everything. And she would do those things.

And she was, again, just glad that, you know, she had the faith to help to correct things that she could and get things done as she could. And she would do those things. And she wouldn't--. Like I say, she wouldn't let go until she could get them done, you know. But those were just the things that I remember from her.

PL: Well, I think you were very fortunate to have her in your family and in your life--

NC: Yes.

PL: --because she was quite an outstanding person.

NC: She really, really was, and everything. And I miss her dearly, and I know one day, we're all going to meet again, you know.

PL: Well, Mr. Cannon, I thank you very, very much for coming and spending this time with me and sharing your thoughts with us. I'm sure it's going to be a very--.
[Pause] I'm at a loss for words, but I think it's going to add to the volume of information that we're getting about her for the life and times of Mrs. Ellen Green. So thank you very much for coming.

NC: And thank you.

PL: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]